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LAWRENCE GOODRICH: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for coming. My name is Lawrence Goodrich. I'm the Communications Director for the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. Our Commissioners are going to make some remarks about our Annual Report and then we will take questions from members of the press.

And now I'll introduce to you Michael Young.

MICHAEL YOUNG: Thank you and welcome. I am Chair of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom and today the Commission publicly releases its third Annual Report to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress as required by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. We're also issuing the latest in our continuing series of individual country reports today on Indonesia and Uzbekistan. Reports issued earlier this year, which we also have available today, include Sudan, North Korea, China, and Turkmenistan.

The Commission is the only government agency in the world with a mission to review and report violations of freedom abroad. What is also unique is our statutory mandate. We are required by law to take information regarding religious freedom in other countries, information gained from all possible sources including State Department reports, NGO reports, missions abroad, expert briefings and our contact with religious groups and non-governmental organizations and develop policy solutions; that is, things that the United States can and should do to promote international religious freedom as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international documents.

We don't duplicate the State Department's reporting. In fact, we're separate and independent from the State Department and the rest of the executive branch and the legislative branch. Rather, our mandate is to take all available information and develop policy solutions that advance the cause of religious freedom abroad.

In its three years of operation, the Commission has made recommendations to the Administration and Congress that have had a significant impact on the promotion of religious freedom as an integral part of U.S. foreign policy. For example, last year's report urged the President to appoint a special envoy for Sudan, which he did. At our urging, both the Clinton Administration and the Bush Administration have increased the percentage of U.S. food aid in Sudan that goes to operations outside of Operation Lifeline Sudan, so that Khartoum cannot block it.

This year, the Commission recommended to President Bush that it condition a state visit to China on the Chinese government's providing an opportunity to make a major speech on religious freedom and human rights televised live and uncensored to the Chinese people. He delivered just such an address on February 21st.

The campaign against terrorism has changed the relationships the United States has with many foreign countries, including several whose governments engage in severe violations of religious freedom. In some cases these new relationships afford a unique

opportunity to encourage much needed improvements by governments in the protection of religious freedom. For example, the United States now has the heightened attention of the governments of Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, as well as significant assistance programs in those countries.

IRFA encourages flexibility in responses to freedom – violations of freedom of religion and emphasizes positive actions where appropriate, such as foreign assistance programs and educational and cultural exchanges as well as punitive ones. This Commission has recommended the enhanced use of these positive incentives and constructive tools with those governments of the countries mentioned.

At the same time, the United States government must ensure that steps to improve relations with cooperating countries that have major problems protecting religious freedom and other human rights, such as China, Russia, Pakistan, Sudan, and Uzbekistan do not undermine its human rights message to the governments of these countries. It should carefully monitor whether these steps are impeding progress on improvements in protecting human rights and take appropriate action if in any way they are.

This year's Annual Report touches on religious freedom in two dozen countries with specific recommendations on China, Indonesia, North Korea, Sudan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. A few of these individual country reports were issued earlier in the spring and the Commission will issue additional reports throughout the coming months and year. The Annual Report also contains our analysis on how the State Department is implementing the International Religious Freedom Act with recommendations for how that implementation can be improved.

But before we get to specific countries, let me introduce my fellow Commissioners. We have with us today Ambassador Charles Stith, Director of the African Presidential Archives and Research Center at Boston University, a member of our Executive Committee; Dr. Firuz Kazemzadeh, Professor Emeritus at Yale University and Senior Advisor to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States; Dr. Richard Land, President and the Chief Executive Officer of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Not with us today is Bishop William Murphy, who is Bishop of the diocese of Rockville Centre in New York. Bishop Murphy is attending a funeral of one of his parish priests today – our sympathies are with him. Also not with us today, stuck on the tarmac in St. Louis, is Professor Leila Sadat, a Professor of Law at Washington University, St. Louis. But with us today is Nina Shea, Director of the Center for Religious Freedom at Freedom House and Ambassador Shirin Tahir-Kheli, Director of the South Asia Program of the Foreign Policy Institute at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Study.

Felice Gaer, Director of the American Jewish Committee, the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights, also an Executive Committee member, could not be with us today. She's participating in a session of the United Nations

Committee Against Torture in Geneva. I'd also like to acknowledge the dedicated work by our staff led by Acting Director – Executive Director Tad Stahnke.

It is, as always, a pleasure to serve on this Commission. All of us are deeply committed to promoting respect for the right to freedom of religion. With careful deliberation, the Commission by consensus has agreed on the specific policy recommendations contained in this report. We believe they will advance considerably the protection of religious freedom in countries around the globe. We urge the President, the Secretary of State, and the Congress to work assiduously towards their implementation.

Now let us spend just a minute or two on each of the country reports contained in the report and let me start with Commissioner Nina Shea, who will speak briefly on Sudan.

NINA SHEA: The Commission in its past two Annual Reports found that the government of Sudan to be the world's most violent abuser of the right to freedom of religion and belief. The Commission also found that religion is a major factor in Sudan's ongoing civil war and that religious persecution by the Khartoum regime is intertwined with other human rights and humanitarian violations in Sudan, including aerial bombardment of civilians and of humanitarian facilities, deliberate denial of international humanitarian assistance, abduction of women and children into conditions of slavery, and the forcible displacement of populations from oil-producing areas.

As was graphically demonstrated in the bombing of the World Food Program's feeding center in western – (unintelligible) – on February 20th, 2002, and April, 2002, denial of access for humanitarian relief flights on which almost two million people depend, Sudan's government continues to commit genocidal atrocities against civilian populations in the south and central parts of that country.

In its three years of studying the Sudan civil war, the Commission has found that the development of Sudan's oil wealth has become an increasingly important factor in the intensification of the conflict. A just peace in Sudan is not possible unless the Khartoum regime is prevented from using the country's oil revenues to step up its brutal war against the south.

The Commission recommends that any comprehensive ceasefire in the Sudan be conditioned on placing the country's oil revenues in an internationally administered trust fund to be expended solely for developmental and humanitarian purposes on an equitable basis in both the north and the south. In order to move Khartoum to the peace table, the Commission also urges the Administration and the Senate to support the House version of the Sudan Peace Act, which includes important disclosure requirements and a provision limiting access to American capital markets by foreign oil companies involved in Sudan's oil industries. These are provisions that were first proposed by the Commission in its 2000 Annual Report.

The Commission recommends that peace talks should be based on the declaration of principles previously agreed to by Khartoum and opposition groups under the intergovernmental authority on development, or IGAD, including self-determination for the south and a secular government that would ensure religious freedom for all individuals, north and south.

Thank you.

MR. YOUNG: Thank you.

Dr. Richard Land on China.

RICHARD LAND: China continues to commit severe violations of freedom of religion and belief, and to discriminate against individuals on the basis of their religion or belief. There are numerous egregious violations against members of many of China's religious and spiritual communities, including Evangelical Christians, Roman Catholics, Tibetan Buddhist, Uighur Muslims, and other groups such as the Falun Gong that the government has labeled evil cults.

In order to protect freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief the Chinese government must take effective steps in the following four critical areas. U.S. policy should encourage such steps and effectively respond to whether or not such steps are indeed taken. Number one, ending the crackdown. The Chinese government should end the abusive practices that constitute its current crackdown on religious and spiritual groups throughout China.

Second, reforming the repressive legal framework. The Chinese government should substantially change its system of laws, policies, and practices that govern religious and spiritual organizations and activities. Third, affirming the universality of religious freedom in China's international obligations. The Chinese government should fully respect the universality of the right to freedom of religion and belief along with other human rights. The Chinese government should also ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The U.S. government should undertake to strengthen security by international and U.S. bodies of China's human rights practices and the implementation of international obligations.

Four, fostering a culture of respect for human rights. In light of its international obligations to ensure and protect human rights, the Chinese government should take steps to initiate and to foster a culture of respect for human rights in China. The Chinese government can be assisted and motivated in this effort through U.S. government action in the areas of foreign assistance, public diplomacy, securities disclosure requirements, business practices, as well as other avenues.

MR. YOUNG: Let me say a word or two about two additional countries. The first is Indonesia, on which we have issued recommendations. The Commission continues to be concerned about the religious freedom and religious-based violence in

Indonesia. In the Molucca Islands, brutal sectarian violence between Muslims and Christians erupted in May of 1999 resulting in the deaths of approximately 9,000 people. On the island of Sulawesi, fighting between Christians and Muslims that has occurred intermittently since 1998 threatened to develop into a full-scale massacre after members of a militant Muslim group known as the Laskar Jihad entered the island in July of 2001.

In the case of the Moluccas, government neglect of the conflict prolonged the sectarian violence and allowed unimpeded the entry into the island to such groups as the Laskar Jihad, raising the level of violence and killing. In Sulawesi, swifter government action to stop the aggression of militant groups managed to prevent a serious escalation of fighting. Peace accords have since been signed in both regions. In Sulawesi in December of 2001, and in the Moluccas in February of 2002. However, particularly in the Moluccas concern about the durability of the agreement remains.

The U.S. government should continue to press the government of Indonesia to fully disarm all outside militia forces such as Laskar Jihad on the Moluccas and Sulawesi. The U.S. should strongly encourage Indonesia to maintain neutral and professional troops in both places until reconciliation efforts have taken root and the rule of law established to such an extent that refugees are able to return safely. The U.S. government should continue to support the reconciliation and reconstruction efforts of nongovernmental organizations in both areas.

This should include increased funding for such efforts through support for the U.S. government's democracy and good governance programs, interreligious programs at educational institutions, and other programs in Indonesia. The U.S. should monitor the implementation of Sharia and the implementation of Sharia law in Aceh to determine if individual rights and freedoms, including religious freedom as outlined in international documents are being guaranteed.

And the U.S. should ensure that if resumed, U.S. military – the U.S.-Indonesia military ties be directed towards reform of the Indonesian military, including accepting civilian control, international human rights standards, and holding members accountable for abuses.

Let me turn now for a moment to North Korea. The people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are perhaps the least free on Earth, barely surviving under a totalitarian regime that denies basic human dignity and lets them starve while pursuing military might and weapons of mass destruction. There are no personal freedoms of any kind in North Korea and no protection for human rights. Religious freedom does not exist and what little religious activity that is permitted by the government appears to be largely staged for foreign visitors.

North Korea is also a humanitarian disaster of unimaginable proportions. Failed economic policies have reportedly left one million or more North Koreans dead from starvation and disease in the last 10 years, not to mention countless millions still suffering from the aftereffects of starvation.

The Commission's recommendations fall under three general headings: pursuing an international initiative against human rights violations, protecting North Korean refugees, and advancing human rights through bilateral contacts. In pursuing an international initiative against human rights violations, the United States should launch a major initiative to expose human rights abuses within North Korea and to educate the international community about what is occurring there. Congress should make funds available for independent experts to conduct a comprehensive study of the human rights conditions in North Korea making extensive use of interviews with North Korean refugees and other sources of information.

When addressing the issue of human rights in North Korea, one cannot ignore the plight of the tens of thousands of North Koreans who have risked their lives to flee their homeland in search of freedom and food. Indeed, the situation is so bad they are fleeing into China. The United States must urge members of the international community, particularly China, to grant refugee status to those North Koreans who make it across the border into that country. The U.S. should also urge the Chinese government to allow more South Korean and international NGOs to provide humanitarian aid and relief to North Korean refugees who are in China.

Finally, regarding bilateral contacts the United States government should use what contacts it has with the North Korean government to advance an agenda that includes the protection of religious freedom and other human rights. The U.S. government should urge the North Korean government to allow considerable expansion of both the amount of assistance and the number of aid providers. Finally, the United States should press the North Korean government to allow those Americans with family ties in North Korea to reunite with the relatives who are still living in that country.

Now let me turn to Ambassador Charles Stith for remarks on Uzbekistan.

CHARLES STITH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The conditions for religious freedom are very poor in Uzbekistan. In addition to a highly restrictive law on religion that severely limits the ability of minority religions to function, the Uzbek government in recent years has harshly cracked down on Muslim individuals, groups, and mosques that do not conform to government-prescribed ideas on how the Islamic faith should be practiced and expressed.

This crackdown has resulted in the arrest of thousands of persons and there are credible reports that many have been and continue to be tortured in detention, torture that in some cases has been fatal. While the government of Uzbekistan does face threats to its security from certain religious groups that have used violence against it, the government's mass arrest of religious believers and reports of torture nevertheless suggest that gravely troubling religious freedom violations are occurring in that country.

The United States should press the Uzbek government to cease its abuse of those articles in its criminal code that impinge on religious freedom. The U.S. should strongly

encourage the Uzbek government to establish a mechanism to review the cases of persons detained under suspicion of or charged with religious, political, or security offenses and to release those who have been imprisoned solely because of their religious beliefs.

While recognizing the Uzbek government's duty to protect its people from violence and terrorism from whatever source, the U.S. should press the government of Uzbekistan to discontinue its practice of excessively regulating the free practice of religion in Uzbekistan, including the oppressive regulation of the Islamic clergy and the use of registration requirements to prevent minority religious groups from practicing their faith.

All U.S. assistance to the Uzbek government with the exception of assistance to improve humanitarian conditions and advance human rights should be made contingent upon Uzbekistan's taking concrete steps to improve conditions for religious freedom for all individuals and religious groups in that country. The U.S. should retain the – a reinstated Uzbek language program at the Voice of America and should use VOA and other appropriate avenues of public diplomacy to explain to the people of Uzbekistan why religious freedom is an important element of U.S. foreign policy as well as specific concerns about religious freedom in their country.

MR. YOUNG: Finally, allow me to introduce Dr. Firuz Kazemzadeh on Turkmenistan.

FIRUZ KAZEMZADEH: Turkmenistan can be described as one of the most totalitarian states in the world today. Human rights are severely curtailed by the highly authoritarian government of President Saparmurat Niyazov who rules Turkmenistan by means of an excessive cult of personality. Conditions for religious freedom in Turkmenistan are extremely poor. Only two religions, Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodoxy, are officially recognized and even these two are highly restricted by the state. The government tolerates only those Muslim religious teachers and believers who accept and fully cooperate with state authority.

Similar to its control over the Islamic clergy, the Turkmen governments council for religious affairs exercises direct control over the hiring, promotion, and firing of the Russian orthodox clergy. Other religions are effectively prohibited from operating freely. Members of minority religious groups have reportedly been arrested, denied – detained with allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, imprisoned, deported, harassed, fined, and have had their services disrupted, congregations dispersed, religious literature confiscated, and places of worship destroyed.

The U.S. government should designate Turkmenistan as a country of particular concern for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. It should immediately suspend all non-humanitarian assistance to the government of Turkmenistan with the exception of programs that serve U.S. national security interests in connection with the campaign against terrorism.

The U.S. should scrutinize all aspects of any remaining assistance programs in Turkmenistan to ensure that these programs do not facilitate Turkmen government policies or practices that result in religious freedom violations. The U.S. should support efforts to facilitate Turkmenistan's sale of natural gas including support for the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline only if the Turkmen government takes definitive steps to improve substantially conditions for religious freedom. State visits between the United States and Turkmenistan should be suspended until such time as religious freedom conditions in the country have improved significantly.

The U.S. should also encourage scrutiny of religious freedom violations in Turkmenistan in appropriate international fora, such as the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe and other multilateral venues.

MR. YOUNG: Thank you very much.

That's a brief summary of our findings and recommendations. We'll now be happy to take questions from the press, and let me call Larry Goodrich, who is our director of communications to moderate that portion of the press conference.

Larry?

MR. GOODRICH: Yes, sir.

Q: (Off mike) – the bloodletting – the communal bloodletting in Gujarat in India has been just horrific. Prime Minister Vajpayee himself has called it a blot on the nation, but at the same time the Indian government has told outsiders, especially the European Union, to bud out – that it's an internal affair of India.

The State Department has also described what happened in Gujarat as horrific, but sort of acknowledged that it's a sort of an internal matter of India. Besides expressing concern, what is the Commission going to be doing in terms of what the U.S. government should do because the Commission has not been able to get invited to India, and I remember a few years ago when Robert Seiple made some remarks he was told that he's unwelcome. What does the Commission intend doing besides expressing concern, which is what the State Department has done?

MR. YOUNG: Thank you. I'll invite other Commissioners to offer their views as well, but I would say the first thing – (unintelligible) – that the Commission makes policy recommendations. We are not in a position to implement policy. The world would be a much better place if we were – (laughter) – but unfortunately we have not yet got that statutory authority, but we have done more than express concern about this. In light of this, we actually issued a statement calling on the United States to help the Indian government to foster a climate of religious tolerance citing a series of recommendations we also made at our May of 2001 report. We did this in March of 2002.

We remain very concerned about it and we continue to urge the U.S. government to actually work with the Indian government to take steps to stop any communal violence of that sort. That is referenced in the report. Also the copy of the statement in the letter that we have sent is available to the press.

Q: But that's not here – (off mike) – talking specifically about – (off mike).

MR. YOUNG: This is March of 2002. No, it's not last year's list. It's March of 2002.

Q: Can we have – (off mike).

MR. YOUNG: Certainly. Absolutely.

MR. GOODRICH: Anybody else?

MS. SHEA: Yes. (Off mike) – when you take a look at the March statement which occurred right after the Gujarat incidents. I think you'll note the Commission's concern about events. The Commission has actually gone back to the government of India sort of reminding them we have a request outstanding to visit and sort of discuss issues as we do in other parts of the world. I think there are only two countries, if I am correct, Mr. Chairman, where the Commission has been barred from coming. One is China, the other is India, and that's – the different types of systems, that's a little puzzling.

And I think that there have been other human rights institutions that have put out reports on the Gujarat violence, which I think members of the Commission have been particularly sort of moved by, and this issue remains under active consideration. As you will note, our reports are not necessarily confined because unfortunately violations of rights of religious freedom do not occur to suite the Commission's putting out the report. They occur throughout the year and we have now started this practice of rolling reports, so it's under active consideration.

MR. GOODRICH: Yes?

Q: (Off mike) – saying how security disclosure requirements would help promote religious freedom.

MR. YOUNG: You're talking about disclosures regarding the issuance of securities in the United States. Just to give a little background to that, the commission has particularly in the case of Sudan recommended that with respect to companies doing business in the oilfields in Sudan that they not necessarily have an opportunity to participate in capital markets in the United States and more broadly speaking that securities – in all securities filings with respect to companies doing business in those that have been designated by the U.S. government, those countries are particularly concerned that they be required to disclose the extent of their activities in those countries.

Now, in large measure we believe that's entirely consistent with the mandate of the SEC already because I think events have made clear the political risk involved in those companies – countries and therefore that inures to those companies doing business in countries that have been so designated.

In that context, in fact Laura Unger, during her tenure prior to the confirmation of Mr. Pitt as chairman of the SEC actually sent a letter indicating that there was agreement within the SEC to that position. It's unclear at the moment what the SEC's position is. We believe that that is relevant information for investors because it relates to the economic stability of those countries. Political risk often does. That's a very good barometer of high levels of political risk and investors ought to be informed and aware of that.

Secondly, we know that many investors in the United States who also care about the moral and ethical behavior of the companies in which they are investing, and this gives information that makes available to those investors information about precisely what those companies are doing to allow them to make informed judgments about the desirability of investing in those companies. In our judgment, it simply enhances the operation of the marketplace. As it enhances the operation in the marketplace, it will urge American companies to take a more responsible role as well as any other companies that participate in the U.S. stock market to take a more responsible role in dealing with the governments and the peoples of the countries in which they have operations.

Other Commissioners may have views as well.

MS. SHEA: I just want to point out briefly that our recommendation is also for sanctions against foreign companies from delisting them from the U.S. stock exchanges – the American Stock Exchange for example. And what this would do to companies I think is revealed by what Talisman Energy president Jim Buckey said when he was told about the passage of the Sudan Peace Act by the House last June – Talisman being one of the companies that would be affected, and he said no asset is worth that. He said, if it's a choice between the U.S. capital markets and Sudan, we'd be out of Sudan, so –

MR. GOODRICH: Yes, sir?

Q: (Off mike) – Sudan. The U.S. government has not any permanent diplomatic mission in Sudan. This raise the question about the source of information about Sudan. The Commission I think used to sneak illegally to – (off mike) – listening to one part of the conflict reporting and make allegation against the government of Sudan without – (off mike) – or paying one single visit to the Sudan.

MR. YOUNG: Okay, what's your question, sir?

Q: Okay, I'm coming to my question. This is question the source of your information about Sudan.

MR. YOUNG: Okay.

MS. SHEA: Yes, in our – as – (unintelligible) – we rely on many different sources: NGOs, international agencies, the UN Special – (unintelligible) – on Sudan, the State Department. For example, the bombing of BA (ph) on February 20th by the government of Sudan was documented by the World Food Program because it was their operation that was bombed. There is also recently press releases put out by the UN World Food Program again of 1.7 million people – starving people being cut off from international food aid, again as put out by this UN agency. So those are our sources.

MR. YOUNG: I think it's also worth clearing up one misapprehension. In fact, one Commissioner has visited Sudan as well.

Sir?

Q: (Unintelligible) – from the Pakistani – (off mike) – and on Uzbekistan you said the Uzbek government promotes a moderate version of Islam. This is the (unintelligible) of the State Department report. Now, is that a bad thing to do or a good thing to do, because in the sense that when Musharraf in Pakistan follows a moderate form of Islam, he is praised by the government of the United States. So what does a Muslim government do?

I think there is a bit of a dilemma here that if it cracks down on fundamentalist Muslim organizations or extremist organizations, then will it be in violation of religious freedom?

MR. STITH: I think the concern of the Commission stems from the fact that in Uzbekistan there has been a persecution of any Muslim who did not follow the government's prescriptions for the way that he should conduct himself. It was not for criminal acts. It was not necessarily for extremism. It was simply that the government imposes complete control on all manifestations of Islam. The government limits the styles of dress that people may wear. They arrest people because they wear beards. They arrest people because they go to mosque too frequently. It's very different than cracking down on those who violate the law – who engage in criminal acts.

In fact, this has been always the position of the Commission, which is consonant with the American tradition that you punish people for their acts, not for their beliefs. And in Uzbekistan the persecution of the Islamic clergy and of the Muslims in general has gone far beyond punishing anybody for acts.

MR. YOUNG: Thank you. Allow me to add just one other aspect to that. It is not that we oppose or advocate any particular type of government. Our concern is the behavior of the government in that context. For example, we've been very troubled by the government's application of article 159 of the criminal code that criminalizes anti-state activity in the rather discriminatory – apparently discriminatory way in which that's

been implemented, as well as article 216 of the code which criminalizes membership in forbidden religious organizations. We don't see that those – that those laws have been used in a way that's appropriate in a country that has expressed its adherence to the international agreements on religious liberties and human rights.

MR. GOODRICH: Sir?

Q: (Off mike) – two questions. One is on page 59. You mention that Sharia law should not be applied to non-Muslims in Sudan. Does that mean that you approve of Sharia law for the Muslims and have you studied the punishments – criminal punishments which are imposed under the Sharia law and in the opinion of this Commission are they okay?

And the second thing is you mention that there should be no tradeoff between terrorism, support for antiterrorism and also religious freedom. If I understand President Bush, under no circumstances for whatever cause terrorism is not justified. Does the Commission agree with that that terrorism is not justified in the name of religious freedom or any other cause? (Audio break.)

MR. YOUNG: As long as it is faithful to the international commitments on religious liberties and on human rights and civil rights more generally. The Commission, though, hasn't taken the position that Sharia law is inherently inconsistent with those, but any provision of Sharia law, just as in any provision of the American constitution or any other law that is inconsistent with those human rights is something that we do condemn. We do think laws must be applied – must be interpreted, and acted and applied in a way that's consistent with those principles of international law.

We have expressed concern about the application of Sharia law in Aceh, for example, where it does seem that it's being either enacted or interpreted or applied in a way that is inconsistent with that country – with its commitments under some of the international human rights treaties and that is a problem that we've been – we've expressed concern on and have urged higher degrees of monitoring. So it isn't a question of us taking a particular position on Sharia law, but the specific parts of any legal system must pay adequate deference and attention to those human rights commitments that countries have made.

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. YOUNG: Pardon me?

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. YOUNG: We have said it applies to Saudi Arabia absolutely. There is – we have made statements on Saudi Arabia – a report on Saudi Arabia and taken exactly the same position on Saudi Arabia and said it with vigor and force and unanimity on the part of the Commission.

With respect to your next question, is terrorism justified in any circumstance, our position has been consistently and across the board that a country has a right to protect itself from terrorist activities and we have said that again and again and again. It cannot use that cover of a war against terrorism or a quest to root out terrorists to engage in blanket and indiscriminate rounding up of people simply because of their religious belief. This is what we've said with respect to Uzbekistan, what we said with respect to Turkmenistan – that there is nothing that would prevent a country – and we believe a country has a right to defend itself against terrorism. We strongly support the President's efforts to protect the United States against terrorism. At the same time, it cannot be used as simply an excuse for indiscriminate rounding up of people, arresting people, torturing people based solely on their religious beliefs and their religious activities.

MR. GOODRICH: Yes, right here?

Q: (Off mike) – do any of you see a connection with the implementation and imposition of Sharia or Islamic law going along with an increase in religious persecution in Muslim-dominated or controlled nations? And I'm wondering if any of you feel capable of making a comparison when you look at the Taliban in Afghanistan, the way they have dealt with religion and other Muslim nations using Sharia or Islamic law.

MR. YOUNG: Again, I'll just simply reiterate my statement that “have we seen an increase in religious persecution in countries that have adopted Sharia law?” I wouldn't say that as a general statement. I would say that specific instances, in the case of Nigeria for example, we have expressed concern about the possible adoption of Sharia law as it is being defined by the legislatures that are adopting it in terms of its application in the two northern provinces that are looking at it. We have expressed concern about the application of that law in Aceh.

We have not expressed – taken a position with respect to Sharia law generally and I don't imagine we will. It is the specific provisions and their application that is the matter of great concern. The theoretical and conceptual basis for a legal system is not something that we have particularly focused on or feel inclined or I think are qualified or statutorily authorized to look at.

MS. SHEA: I'd just like to add that in the case of Sudan what we saw – what we are seeing there is Sharia law that's being threatened to be applied to non-Muslims – is being applied to in some cases non-Muslims in the North and threatened to apply it to the south. In fact, that's what triggered this conflict back in the 80s was the abrogation of the Addis Ababa agreement but Khartoum and the imposition of Sharia law throughout the south, which is mainly non-Muslim, Christian – (unintelligible).

And this Commission expressed concern about that in our call for religious – greater religious freedom in Sudan and we expressed concern for the case of the teenage woman who has been sentenced to be stoned to death in the north for adultery. I think

she claimed her defense was that she was raped and that was then commuted after international pressure from the Commission and others.

MR. GOODRICH: Yes, over here?

Q: Yeah – (off mike) – with regard specifically to Uighur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists, has their situation worsened or gotten better in the last year, and if so in what way?

MR. YOUNG: I'll say a word about that and invite my fellow Commissioners as well. The situation of Tibetan Buddhists is bad and has remained bad. We don't see any evidence of particular improvements there. With respect to the Uighur Muslims, it does appear that there has been an expansion of the crackdown on Uighur Muslims in China. There seem to be, by many reliable reports, a large number that have been imprisoned. We're all aware of the case of Rebia Kadir who has been imprisoned for the crime of sending public newspaper articles to her husband who lived outside the country, which was considered treason apparently by the Chinese government.

The situation for the Uighur Muslims does seem to have gotten worse. The Chinese government has to some extent claimed that this is a hotbed of separatists and terrorists and anti-state actors – (audio break, tape change).

Q: – reporter. The question of – (off mike) – China is directed to Mr. Richard Land and earlier you mentioned President Bush took your advice – the Commission's advice and did a speech on religious freedom at a university in China, but we still wonder the effectiveness of the recommendation by the Commission in light of increased religious persecution as reported by the Commission. And what seems to be the problem here?

Thank you.

MR. LAND: Well, we were delighted that the President was able to give the speech and that it was uncensored and went out across China. I thought it was a particularly eloquent speech personally advocating the universality of religious freedom. As we say in our report, and as I said in my remarks, we as a Commission believe that the situation is not going to markedly improve without continuous pressure from the government of the United States on the government of China and continuous pressure by the government of the United States on the international community to continue pressure on the government of China to improve the whole fabric and framework of religious freedom, religious – the right to religious freedom and other human rights in the People's Republic of China.

And we continue to encourage our government to do that at every level that it is possible to do and hope that we will have success in getting our government to do that and that our government will have success as they can apply continuous pressure for

improvement of the rights of Chinese citizens to exercise freedom of conscience in the area of religion and belief.

MR. GOODRICH: Sir, right here. Do you have a question, sir?

Q: (Off mike) – Christian Science Monitor. As you know, there's been quite a bit of criticism since the war on terrorism began that the U.S. government is overlooking – in a number of countries overlooking human rights violations of various sorts as the U.S. has pressed for those governments to participate in the war on terrorism, and I'm wondering how the Commission doesn't – is not subject to that same criticism when in a number of cases I heard calling for cutting off of aid except in the case of application or furthering the war on terrorism.

MR. YOUNG: Let me say a word or two about that. I believe other Commissioners certainly will have views as well. With respect to the latter part, I think if you read our recommendations carefully, you'll see that the kinds of aid that we have suggested be cut off are aids that – aid that can be used in this oppressive manner with respect to governments that are oppressive. We have examples of cases for instance where we suggest that all but humanitarian aid be cut off. We don't see that inconsistent with the – with either the war against terrorism or with advancing the cause – we don't see that inconsistent with the war against terrorism or advancing the interest of freedom of religion abroad.

There are other cases in which we have suggested that other kinds of aid be cut off – that may facilitate those government-instituted brutalities that have been particularly used in the oppression of their people and so forth. At the same time, we have tried to modulate these concerns that allow the U.S. government to continue to cooperate with that government to protect U.S. national interests. That seems a consistent – at the same time I don't think that is at all inconsistent with a continued quest for expanding religious freedom.

Let me explain that just a little bit if I may. We have – as we say in our report, as we have said in letters to the President and the Secretary of State, as we have said in personal meetings with U.S. government officials, we think that advancing the cause of religious freedom in particular and human rights generally is not only not inconsistent with the war on terrorism, it is in fact the heart of the war – that in many of these cases terrorism finds a happy breeding ground in part because people feel disenfranchised and oppressed and in fact that at the end of the day we must leave behind societies that give adequate respect to the human dignity of their citizens, and that is in the end the only sure cure for these kinds of problems and that advancing human rights is not only something that shouldn't be jettisoned overboard as excess baggage in this fight, it is not even baggage. It is the heart of the fight.

And to that effect we have had, I must say, some very positive conversations with senior government officials who actually believe that the expanded interaction with many of these countries gives us expanded opportunities to press these concerns and

opportunities to advance these interests, and I think we're actually seeing some of that in the case of Afghanistan, in the case of Pakistan, and other countries with which we're working closely.

MR. LAND: I made this point when I was privileged to speak on behalf of the Commission in Moscow in March, and made the further point that the gold standard for this Commission is not the U.S. constitution for countries outside the United States. As much as we recommend it as a model, we think it's the best model, but it's not the requirement. It's not the gold standard. The gold standard is the UN Declaration on Human Rights and other international documents that virtually every country in the world has signed. Those documents allow a country to give preference to a religious or cultural system over others. What they don't allow them to do is to deny the right to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion or belief for citizens who disagree with that religion to which they give preference.

And I want to reiterate what our Chairman said. You know, it's my belief that the terrorism that we've been confronted with in this country and around the world in the last year or so can only flourish in closed societies where all disagreement is silenced at the point of a bayonet or the barrel of a gun. When you allow freedom of conscience, freedom of dissent, freedom of ideas you don't have terrorism flourishing in those kinds of societies, and so I think that the best long-term insurance against the world being threatened by these kinds of terrorist activities are free and open societies where there is freedom of conscience and freedom of belief.

MS. SHEA: Let me just add something on concrete terms also. We were very concerned these – our report reflects this on Sudan – that there was or was perceived to be a tradeoff of policy that soon after September 11th in I think still in September the U.S. government lifted its veto to the UN ending sanctions against Sudan and at the same time was giving praises to Sudan for its cooperation on the war against terrorism and at the same time stalled the Sudan Peace Act and we were concerned that was seen as a green light by Sudan that it can do whatever it wants to its citizens within its borders as long as it doesn't export terrorism. And we state that in our report and we also then recommend that the oil revenues be conditioned in Sudan – government's oil revenues as a way of showing our seriousness of purpose.

MR. GOODRICH: In the back here?

Q: (Off mike) – have you found since September 11th a rise in those who are engaging in religious oppression under the rubric of the war on terrorism. Is that something that you've seen growing or –

MR. YOUNG: The answer is a qualified yes. I mean, I think the case of China is one example. You have other countries like Afghanistan which have been routinely doing it and are now claiming what from all accounts really is a nonexistent terrorist threat as an excuse for cracking down. But the truth of the matter is I wish it were true

because it would suggest that this is a temporary problem that may at some point go away when the concerns about terrorism abate a bit.

The truth of the matter is that the denial of religious liberty has been widespread and pervasive in a number of countries well before September 11th. It appears to have diminished in a very small number of cases and increased in other cases, but it is a widespread, longstanding problem well before September 11th and we fear even after concerns about terrorism abate it will remain a longstanding and a widespread problem, so I wouldn't say that we have seen an enormous expansion. It was bad enough to begin with and it remains quite bad.

MR. KAZEMZADEH: A good example of the expansion of this kind of justification is the case of Chechnya. About 170 years ago, the Russians invaded. They killed about one-third of the population of Chechnya in the early 19th century. Nobody talked about Islam. It was a colonial war – an old-fashioned, straightforward, colonial war. And after the Second World War, the whole population of Chechnya – the whole people – were transported to northern Kazakhstan and Siberia because they allegedly collaborated with the Germans. There was not a word about religion. All of a sudden now the continuation of this colonial wars is dressed in the garb of religion.

Obviously Chechens are Muslims and they defend their hearth and they use religious terminology, but the Russians picked up on it and are trying to make out of this a religious war.

MR. GOODRICH: Okay, one last question. Ma'am?

Q: I've been covering the Commission for a number of years and just from the tone of questions here I sort of notice the difference in defensiveness maybe. I wonder if that reflects that the Commission's work is becoming more difficult or is it easier as you become established and you work – (off mike)? You mentioned that there are two countries where you haven't been able to get in to visit at all: China and India. Is that what you think is worsened by the Commission's work so far or is that – (off mike)?

MR. YOUNG: Dr. Kazemzadeh eloquently answered, as I walked up here, "both." (Laughter.) It was his answer. It's interesting that you view this as a little more defensive. I've been doing these press conferences for three years and actually this is the first time I've heard reporters sound like they actually are listening to us. And I really – (laughter) – and I thank you for that.

That is not uncommon. I mean, I think in some ways the problem has become challenging because as Dr. Kazemzadeh said so eloquently, we have old-fashioned colonial wars now dressed in the garb of a cleric, as it were, and that creates a difficulty of a certain sort on the one hand.

On the other hand, I have been struck by how much more seriously everybody in the U.S. government and many governments abroad now take the fundamental issue of

religious freedom. In fact, if anything I think our sense is we have gotten a more receptive audience across the board to the things that we've been saying. In fact, I think to the extent one sees people sparring with us more, it's I think in part because they think what we say now really is beginning to matter and we are – as we say, we can cite some very specific instances in which the government has quite specifically followed recommendations to some good effect in our judgment.

So I think it has become more difficult in some ways, but in that difficulty I think lie small seeds of optimism for the Commission in that respect.

MR. GOODRICH: Sir, one last.

Q: (Off mike) – my question is you're a Commission on international religious freedom. How difficult or how easy is it for you to stay focused on religious freedom as opposed to communal violence for example? Do you feel at times that you are straining to conceptually blur the areas or are you able to stay focused?

MR. YOUNG: Let me start. This is – I will ask probably every one of our Commissioners to reply to this. This does detain us a great deal in our deliberations. But there's two parts to your question, but let me separate them out slightly.

One question with respect to staying focused is how much do we stay focused on religious freedom to the exclusion of other basic human rights, and I think the answer to that is we certainly focus primarily on freedom of religion in part because that is a right that I believe Congress believe, as evidenced by the enactment of this legislation, was perhaps given short shrift in many of the discussions of human rights more generally.

At the same time, I think we fully understand that freedom of religion often requires adherence to a number of other basic human and civil rights as well. In the absence of those, freedom of religion really can't flourish; North Korea being, I think, the perfect example of that. In fact, in many of these other countries you find freedom of religion not a central preoccupation because they have virtually no freedom of expression, freedom of thought, or any kind of freedom. That becomes important. Right to trial, to humanitarian kinds of concerns would all become important elements in terms of guaranteeing freedom of religion and so at least in a backhanded way we focus on much of that.

In terms of what is the distinction or the precise line between communal violence and freedom of religion we by and large have tried to focus our efforts largely on those disputes where there does appear to be a religious element to it, either in fact or as articulated by one or another side as a defense or justification for what they're doing to the other side.

It isn't a neat line. We certainly understand that, but it doesn't have to be a neat line in our judgment. To the extent notions of religion are being misused in a way that cause people to fear because of the religion they belong to even if that also happens to be

largely coterminous with their ethnic group, that seems to us more than a justification for attention to be paid to that particular issue.

MR. GOODRICH: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much. That concludes our press conference.

(Cross talk.)

(END)